

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In the twentieth century the character of female hero has begun to appear in the television, comic, film and video game. Some popular female heroes, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *La Femme Nikita*, *Xena: Warrior princess* have broadcasted in American television series to show they can kick some ass. The female characters like *Wonder Woman*, *Cat Woman*, and *Charlie's Angels*, *Ellen Ripley*, *Sarah Connor*, show that they have strength, power, and authority in the film as a hero, not heroine.

The number of female action heroes who appear in popular media rises significantly in these centuries. Innes in her book *Action Chicks* states that "Popular culture can't seem to get enough of tough females," (Innes, 2004, p.2). Inness marks this increasing amount of "tough-women characters" as the beginnings of a Western trend. This makes sense since women begin to take roles into areas that previously have been only reserved for men. Many women work as police officers, female soldiers, and FBI agents, entering the male world of violence and toughness. These new roles of women in real life are reflected in tough women characters featured in contemporary television and film.

Previously, in Hollywood cinema industry heroes have traditionally been male. The female character is usually a heroine, whose role as mother or girlfriend or victim. The film industry has been male-dominated for so long time, women in

film are usually seen as the weak figure that are victimized, subversived, and oppressed in order to enhance the strength and power of male heroes. “Their weakness functioned as a way to enhance the strength and power of the classic male hero; their role was commonly as the “prize” to be won by the hero”. (Knight,2010, p. x).

The traditional gender stereotype was so strong in the American popular culture products but after twentieth century there was a shift of women’s role from victim to hero. This shift of women’s role in the film industry is interesting to study because it is a revolution for women to appear in the heroic roles usually assigned only to men. But multiple studies on female heroes, action chicks and tough women suggest that, such characters cannot be regarded as truly empowering or subversived. Even if women play as heroes, they are still objectified. If there are products of popular culture which features the female character as the hero, the female hero is usually a sheldbom, a pretty, sexy, sensual, even erotic character. We have seen some models of female heroes who are typically sexualized and objectified like *Wonder Woman*, *Charlie’s Angels*, *Cat Woman*, *Foxy Brown*, *Nikita*, etc. Female hero is constructed to be able to fight, combat and destroy her enemies but at the same time her body is still explored as the object of male gaze. (Knight,2010, p.127).

Their freedom and power is limited by the traditional Western thought which see female violence as something threatening, anti-social or even pathological. (Palka, 2015). Therefore, they need to soften their toughness with their attractive

appearance and feminine behavior. It drives my interest in study female hero in *Divergent* who is tough, but at the same time her femininity also strong.

Divergent (2014), a film based on a Roth's popular trilogy of books is really interesting film to analyze. *Divergent* is able to show us that the glory of female hero can be a big hit through an amazing character embedded in an exciting and complex story. *Divergent* story mostly focuses on 'Tris' life struggle to survive and grow in her new faction, Dauntless. The setting of the movie is an apocalyptic world of Chicago, a century after "the war". To maintain the peace, the 'Founders' divides Chicagoans into five factions, each representing a different virtue: Candor (honesty), Amity (peace), Erudite (knowledge), Dauntless (bravery), and Abnegation (selfless). Divergent excludes the factions but it is actually the strongest. Being divergent and rebellious is Tris' strength. She is that rare freak of nature, a "Divergent," who is able to exist in any faction. Because of their independent nature, Divergents are a threat to the status quo and peace because they are uneasy to control. People have always been so threatened by Divergents. So the divergents must be eliminated. To protect her family from her secret, Beatrice decides to choose another faction, Dauntless. She adopts the nickname "Tris" and struggles to fit in tough and crazy living, Dauntless. Live with much dangerous action but it trains her to be the strongest figure in the movie.

Even if this film is adapted from novel, my reason in choosing film rather than novel is that film keeps up to date and responds to the current phenomenon in the society and "Film is laden with metaphors and symbols and affects and reflects

contemporary consciousness” (Rollins, 1979). However, film provides not just a record of visual reality, but also “feelings and attitudes of the periods in which they are made” (Rollins, 1979). Thus by watching a film, we do not only get entertainment, but also particular information of certain places, times, and events through all components of the film. All elements in the film, like lighting, angle, shot duration, juxtaposition, cultural context, and a wide array of other elements can actively reinforce or undermine a sequence's meaning. (http://www.agenti-imobiliare.ro/Structuralist_film_theory.html)

So, in this research I want to know more how the characterization, the behavior, costumes, setting and all components of the film construct the depiction of female hero and how it reflects the ideal women of the twenty first century in America when many women now have their roles not only in domestic sphere but also in public. Inness in her book *Action Chicks*, states that “the rise of the female action heroine was a sign of the different roles available to women in real life” (Inness, 2004, p.6). Through the films that employ women as the heroes, it reflects women of the twenty first century have different roles in real life.

Is it important or useful to study the female heroes’ construction in the popular media? Inness explains: “One reason it is crucial to study the representation of tough women is the tremendous influence popular culture has upon American society. With the postmodern blurring of boundaries between high and low culture, greater numbers of scholars have recognized the importance of studying popular culture in order to better comprehend our society. Popular sources are invaluable when exploring the changing image of women in our society.” (Inness,

1999, p. 6-7). It means popular culture does not simply reflect women's life; it helps to create them. So it needs a critical study. The images that female heroes create "reflect the fact that women are challenging the male monopoly of power and aggression, a shift that has broad ramifications for how gender is constructed". (Inness, 2004, p.5).

Inspired by the work of some researchers on female heroes, like Innes, Knight and Heinecken, I am also interested in analyzing the female hero in the American popular film. Heroism has been constructed of masculine qualities and therefore it is interesting to study the construction of female hero who does not simply follow the traditional masculine model of heroes. Goodwill argues that the new female action hero proves that "masculinity" can be authentically performed by female-bodied persons, and moreover is a laboratory model for ordinary women who wish to assert themselves in the public sphere. Female action heroes model a new heroic archetype which embraces the best traits of both "masculinity" and "femininity." (Goodwill, 2009, p.4).

Then the question that appears are: How does the film *Divergent* construct Tris as the female hero? Does Tris character challenges the gender narrative in American society? Does Tris deconstruct the establishing female hero characters? Does she really reflect and represent American women in the twentieth century who have chance to show their role in public sphere? To answer those questions, this research is conducted.

B. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research belongs to American Studies discipline. Since the object of the research is female hero in the film *Divergent*, I apply Gender studies in analyzing Tris (Beatrice Peer), the main character of the film. But I include other characters which support the analyzing of female hero construction in this film.

C. RESEARCH QUESTION

This research is conducted to answer the following question:

1. How does the film *Divergent* construct the character Tris as female hero?
2. How does the female hero in the film demonstrate masculine and feminine traits?
3. Does she conform or challenge the gender norms of Western society?

D. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The research is done to answer the research question, so the objective of the study are:

1. To describe how the film *Divergent* constructs the character Tris as female hero.
2. To explain how Tris performs her masculinity and femininity traits within the film.
3. To know whether she conform or challenge the gender norms of Western society.

E. BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

In this century the female heroes get their place on the screen and other popular culture products. This phenomenon makes some researcher like Innes, Knight and Heinecken try to study the female hero. The female hero and gender issues surrounding her have always been interesting topic to be researched. There are not many researches about female hero in the English Department program in Sebelas Maret University, especially American Studies mainstream. This research is expected to give deeper understanding about the female hero and some issues surrounding her, and also relate it to the American women social condition in the twentieth century. This research is expected to be beneficial to:

1. English Department students: to inspire them on researching American popular product which employ female hero character. Not only as a part of entertainment, if we think critically this popular product reveal us the social and cultural condition of US. Popular product, even if it is the form of capitalism, but it also affects the way of thinking because “Film is laden with metaphors and symbols and affects and reflects contemporary consciousness” (Rollins, 1979)
2. Other researchers: to give more information to other researchers who have same interest on female hero in the popular product.

F. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Type of Research

This research belongs to qualitative research because the analysis is presented in the form of description of qualitative data. Focusing on the cultural

text analysis, qualitative research attempts to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

American studies apply the practice of Qualitative research in order to define the American culture and to find the meaning behind the artifacts. Qualitative research tries to find the meaning behind the sign and symbols in an artifact. Film is the cultural artifact, so it needs qualitative research which stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, to seek answers of the questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. This research is conducted to analyze how the film constructs its female hero and how it reflects the ideal women of the twenty first century. Therefore, in order to understand how the construction in female hero represents social construction of American society, qualitative research is needed. This qualitative research focuses on descriptive activity, which seeks to understand multi-perspective reality (Sutopo, 2002) and to understand how the participants interpret or making meaning of a certain situation or phenomenon. The practice of this qualitative research is conducted in ‘non-interactive method’, that is by making observation.

2. Data and Source of Data

This research uses two types of data. First is the primary data I collected from the source of data. The source of data is *Divergent* film. Since the primary data is a film, the primary data that I use in this research are all elements of film that support my research topic, that is film’s *mise en scene* and all intrinsic

elements. It would be film's title, characterization of the film's main character, dialogues, scenes, plot, settings, costumes, gestures, sound, lighting and other cinematographic elements. But it especially focuses on the elements that construct the representation of female hero in the movie. To support the analysis of primary data, the secondary data is needed. The secondary data is taken from researches conducted by other researchers, books, reviews, journal, articles and other references related to the topic and object of the research. Those data are found through library studies and internet browsing.

3. Technique of Collecting Data

To get the appropriate data, the film is watched several times to understand the portrayal of the female hero character in the film. In the same time, it is necessary to highlight the important scene, dialogues and events which is relevant to the topic of research. After that, I captured the most important scenes which mostly represent the image of female hero in the film. The dialogues and the pictures from the film are the raw data which will be analyzed. Those data are sorted into some subtopics to be analyzed later on.

4. Technique of Analyzing Data

In the process of analyzing the data, the interdisciplinary approaches related to American studies is conducted. The semiotic, socio-cultural and gender approaches are significant for analyzing the data. Semiotic is necessary to find the hidden meaning of the film. I would like to use semiotic to relate the text and context. It is necessary to know whether the film reflects and represent the

women's image in the twenty first century. First, I collect the sign of the film to be decoded. I get them from sorting the important scene and dialogues. Then I analyze the current social significance. The next step is to sketch the all context (historical, cultural, and political) in which the sign appears. It is important to develop my thesis statement. I determine what the sign means by reading some journals, articles, books and other references. To understand the social context of American society, I need to employ socio-cultural approach. Feminist Gender studies is important to analyze and to understand the construction of female hero and relate them with the representation of American women in twenty first century. The construction of female hero's body is also analyzed based on the feminist criticism. The analysis is done by taking advantages of all the acquired data from reference books, and sites in the internet, in order to study more about the relevant topic.

G. THEORETICAL APPROACH

Set within the framework of American Studies, this research applies a multidisciplinary study to understand more about the cultural text I discuss in this thesis. What is American studies and why does it apply multidisciplinary in analyzing popular culture?

In brief definition, American studies is the study of American culture. "Culture" means the way in which subjective experience is organized.(Smith, 1957). "American culture is a transplanted rather than a native growth; it has been heterogeneous rather than homogenous, agglomerative rather than organic". (Spiller, 1973). The complexity of American culture makes it necessary to apply

interdisciplinary to study America. To see American culture as a whole requires knowledge of many disciplines. Because an artifact from a certain culture is not merely literature, but also the creation of the arts, as well as the product of technology and sciences. The problem is that the investigation of American culture as whole does not match with the customary field of operations of any established academic discipline because culture is the unifying concept, the root word which suggests both theory and method. As stated by Richard E. Sykes in *American Studies and the Concept of Culture*, the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further actions. (Sykes, 1963). This is why American studies is interdisciplinary. It is not just to get a new angle on a traditional subject matter or to look on an event from several angles, but because the concept of culture in American Studies revolves, cut accross, and includes the content of all other disciplines (Sykes, 1963).

To understand the culture in a society, we can see from the popular culture product because popular culture is reflection of culture. Nacbar and Lause also argue that popular culture reflects both change and stability. It is necessary to study popular culture because popular culture can provide the reflection necessary to expose and highlight the cultural belief and values. (Nacbar & Lause, 1992) But popular culture does not merely reflects, it also manipulates the audiences. By analyzing the popular product, I contribute to recover the social construction which media makes.

I take *Divergent* film, American popular culture product, to understand American culture. Films have become symbols of social change. It is important to relate the cultural product to the social context when the movie is popularized. For the study of film in social context, requires interdisciplinary skills: film is laden with metaphors and symbols and effects and reflects contemporary consciousness. (Rollins,1979.) Movie reflects ideology, belief, and myths of the society where and when the film is made. Analyzing the popular movies makes us to be critical and aware of the social construction of the reality. It is necessary to understand how popular products influence a society and vice versa.

I take the female hero movie because minorities and women have not fared well in American films. Examining the image of women in film has wisely been seen as a necessary part of women's movement. (Rollins,1979). Gender is still an interesting topic to discuss. Even after the women's movement, the gender problem is still colored American society politically, economically and socially. Gender equivalence is questioned in American society because there are many issues related to gender that is still untied. Popular culture products sometimes want to raise this issue.

But the way popular products present this issue is somehow patterned, there are still formula applied in every popular culture product. This pattern always appears to maintain the ideology that society believes and lives in. Feminist theory reinforces or undermines the political, economic, social, and psychological oppression toward women, which are displayed partially from actual events, or through film and any other literary works. It is also deals with the

social and cultural aspects in literary works (and film), especially for works which reveal the role, influence and position of women. As Tyson states, “Broadly defined, feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural production) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women.” (Tyson, 1998). With the umbrella of feminism, there are a lot of movements which fight for the equality between male and female. It began since the development of more complex conceptions of gender and subjectivity as well as third-wave feminism.

I choose *Divergent* movie because the movie challenges the gender narrative. To analyze the gender issues contained in the movie, I draw on approaches applied by feminist theorists, notably Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and also Halberstam’s *Female Masculinities*. They provide very useful approach of female masculinity and gender binary. It provides a good way of understanding and deconstructing gender binary. It is now possible for us to identify women as capable of being action heroes with some masculine behavioral traits, because there has been shift in point of view how the concept of gender is envisioned in Western society.

So that it is necessary to review some of the relevant gender theory, and the way literary texts of specific time periods have reflected the contemporary ways of framing gender identity. De Beauvoir argues “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch which is described

as feminine. (De Beauvoir 1974, p. 281) De Beauvoir's idea of gender is socially constructed, that gender is a process, not an inherently born.

Up until around the middle of the twentieth century, it was almost universally believed that gender was assigned by biology, so that biological maleness unavoidably implied sociological masculinity, and biological femaleness inevitably implied sociological femininity. But now we should know how Western society has changed in framing gender. So that popular consciousness, popular media, and also gender theory are able to conceive of this envisioning traditional action hero. Even American people can enjoy the view of a "masculine" woman taking on a role previously available only to men: the action hero.

In my theoretical grounding, I draw on the idea of feminist theorists, especially Halberstam and Butler. They provide invaluable insights into female masculinity and gender binary. They also offer an innovative way of understanding and deconstructing gender binary. Butler's insight is used to enhance Halberstam's critique on the gender binary system in female masculinity.

In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam observes that, "Masculinity in this society inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 2). And "compliant forms of femininity" "pressed onto all girls" are "lessons in restraint, punishment, and repression" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 6). In Western society which sticks into patriarchal ideas, masculinity is related to the power, authority and freedom thus femininity has to press in to all girls in demand to enhance the patriarchal power. Girls have been lived in the oppression

and limitation for years, dictated them what should do and should do. So female who perform masculinities is seen as pathological, unnatural and deviant.

In her book Halberstam actually argues that masculinity can exist without men and it challenges the ways which female masculinities are degraded. She states “despite an almost universal concurrence that femaleness does not automatically produce femininity and maleness does not produce masculinity, very few people seemed to be noticing or thinking through the material effects of disassociating sex and gender and this has been particularly true in the sphere of masculinity. Since femininity signifies in general as the effect of artifice, as the essence of “performativity”, and it is transferable, mobile, fluid. But masculinity has an altogether different relation to performance, the real and the natural and it appears to be far more difficult to pry masculinity and maleness apart than femininity and femaleness.” (Halberstam,1998)

Halberstam’s heteronormativity theory also strengthen the notion that popular culture still maintains the idea of heteronormativity in “social, familial, institutional and legal rules that both presume and enforce the norm of heterosexual sex/ gender systems”(Halberstam,1998). This idea can be applied in analyzing the heterosexual relationship of female hero in the film with her male counterpart. The heterosexual matrix is built on the idea that “everybody is heterosexual, that it is natural to be heterosexual, and that gender is visible. The logic goes further that everybody who does not fit in becomes labeled as deviate and thus wrong and has to be punished”. (Halberstam,1998).

Rather than seeing gender as expected biological identity, it is actually a social construct, perhaps only performativity, according to Butler (1999). If gender is merely performativity, thus we might choose to perform alternative gender roles. This is what the female action hero obviously does within the film. Therefore, the female action hero's masculinity is important in the public sphere, since it hits limitation of gender binary. Female masculinity can be defined as female born persons feeling more comfortable behaving or looking masculine (Halberstam,1998). It is important to note that female masculinities do not want to reproduce forms of male masculinities or masculine power, but it produces in own forms of masculinity. Thus the female hero's masculinity and femininity is greatly significant in the science fictional sphere, since it can envision the old archetype of the hero. By using the theory of binary gender system to the analysis of tough female action hero, it certainly lead to idea that female hero performs masculinities and femininities because she chooses to perform both.

This research tries to read and understand the representation of female hero in the movie, especially the idea of femininity and masculinity that is related to gender construction. Julia T. Wood (2005) identifies five themes of femininity and five themes of masculinity. All of the themes are explained in the literature review. I do not expect to use all five themes of masculinity, but should be able to discuss two or three themes in contrast with the hero in this film. The more prevalent part of the theory that I focus on my research is the five themes of femininity that Wood also established. I use all five themes of femininity in order to analyze the hero of the film and to identify whether she is bridging the gap

between masculinity and femininity. I also compare the female hero character in *Divergent* and the previous female heroes in Hollywood cinema industry if it is necessary to support my analysis.

I apply semiotic analysis in this research to read and understand the portrayal of female hero in the movie, especially the idea of femininity and masculinity which is related to gender construction. I use the semiotic film analysis because the text which I analyze is a film of which shot contain a sign. I apply Metz's semiotic model in analyzing this movie. In Saussure's model, the sign consists of *two* elements: a signifier and a signified. This model makes no direct reference to a referent in the world, and can be seen as supporting the notion that language does not "reflect" reality but rather constructs it. Saussure stressed that signs only made sense in terms of their *relationships* to other signs within the same signifying system.

(<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html>)

Metz argues that Film contains system of signs, film is a language. Structuralist film theory emphasizes how films convey meaning through the use of codes and conventions similar to the way languages are used to construct meaning in communication. Unraveling this additional meaning can be quite complex. Lighting, angle, shot duration, juxtaposition, cultural context, and a wide array of other elements can actively reinforce or undermine a sequence's meaning. So I use Metz theory to reveal the meaning of the movie. Metz theory can be applied as the methodology of my research. The semiotics approach is used in the movie to explain the relationship between the signifier and signified, how

signs (text) produce meanings and how it is perceived. Gender theory which includes the concept of masculinity-femininity, the idea of female masculinity, and the concept of gender as performativity are applied to support and provide arguments which fits in the context of American society. The context is analyzed using socio-cultural perspective to finally understand how female hero construction in popular films reflects American women's role in the real life.

H. Thesis Organization

This thesis consists of four chapters. The contents of each chapter are organized as below:

Chapter I encompasses Research Background, Scope of the Study, Research Questions, Objective of the Study, Benefits of the Study, Research Methodology, Theoretical Approach, and Thesis Organization.

Chapter II contains Literature Review covering a review of other references in order to support the analysis. Literature Review consists of Gender Concept, The Idea of Masculinities and Femininities, Semiotics Film Theory and Female Heroes as the role model of American Women in the 21st Century.

Chapter III encompasses Analysis of this research. The analysis consists of the Analysis of Tris' Former Identity, Tris' Transformation: Analysis of her Costume, Tattoo, and Behaviour/ Attitude, Constructing Tris' fighting body, Vulnerable Female Hero and New Image of Action Chick in *Divergent*.

Chapter IV provides Conclusion and Recommendation which are drawn after the research is conducted.